

## SOME RECOLLECTIONS OF HENRY SIDGWICK

BY LORD RAYLEIGH, F.R.S.

[These recollections, written some time ago, have little direct reference to psychical research. But, after seeing Professor Broad's paper, it occurred to me that they might help to make up for the lack of personal contact with Sidgwick which he regrets. I am glad to have the concurrence of several prominent members of the Society's council in this view.]

HENRY SIDGWICK was my uncle by marriage ; and he was a familiar figure to me from my earliest years. But sympathetic though he was, I do not think that children particularly appealed to him or he to them. I never heard whether it was a disappointment to him to have had none of his own. The only incident that comes strongly back to me is that we thought his stammer a grown-up affectation and one to be imitated : which we did to his face!

It was, however, when I went up to Cambridge as an undergraduate that I first really got to know and appreciate him. Mrs Sidgwick was at that time principal of Newnham, and they kept house in a flat there. It was always open to me, and I dined with them alone there several times a term. Mrs Sidgwick was by temperament a sympathetic listener rather than a talker, and she often fell into this rôle while he and I discussed things. No doubt at first my ideas were too crude, and my stock of knowledge too small to draw him out to advantage. But this partly mended itself with lapse of time.

Moreover, one of his salient characteristics was to make the very most of whatever companionship circumstances might offer. Thus, at the time I am speaking of, Mrs Sidgwick was "at home" once a week at tea time to the Newnham students. Many of them were extremely shy, and to keep the conversational ball rolling was not altogether an easy matter. Sidgwick was conscious of this, and said that when there was a difficulty in finding a conversational opening with a young lady, the longer the pause the more important he felt the remark ought to be, so that this embarrassing silence tended to be maintained indefinitely. Outside observers, however, formed a very different impression. As soon as Sidgwick entered the room it seemed to them that any embarrassment vanished like smoke. The group within range of him at once became animated. Everyone was at ease and expanded quite naturally with a sense of their own (usually latent) social gifts.

The secret of his success was in great part that he got really interested in the topics which interested his companion and entered into them with zest, however remote they might be from his own pursuits. Thus about the time I am speaking of (1894), the safety bicycle with pneumatic tyres was a novelty and became a fashionable craze. Many guests brought their bicycles for week-end parties. Talk at country houses often turned on the different makes of bicycles, and their constructional details—not that these were discussed with any real engineering knowledge. Sidgwick was not a bicyclist himself, and I remember him saying that he felt left out in the cold when such topics came up: could anyone recommend him a book which would supply these deficiencies?

This trait of universal interest in whatever interested other people was so striking that it once led me to ask him whether anyone ever bored or irritated him. "Well, yes," he said, "if I make my remarks and cannot get anything in reply there is a temptation to that."

The subject of priggishness came up, and Sidgwick committed himself to the statement that he had never met a prig! I attempted to shake this position by citing a fellow undergraduate whom I had heard holding forth in the Sidgwick's drawing-room a few days before in a way that seemed to me singularly priggish. But he would not have it, and insisted that he had enjoyed the youth's conversation enormously.

These were various aspects of his tendency to make the best of people. He was temperamentally anxious that everyone should have a hearing. I implied once that some scientific heretic had not established a claim to be heard. Sidgwick was annoyed by my attitude, which I daresay was crude enough, and replied in a tone which for him was rather severe: "He asks for attention, not to his authority, but to his arguments." The same spirit showed itself when he received from some paradoxer an elaborate attempt to upset the Newtonian system of mechanics. Anyone of note in the academic world is likely to receive communications of this kind occasionally, and the reply is usually (I imagine) of the briefest. In Sidgwick's case the subject was quite outside the line of his own studies, and this circumstance would have given him a perfectly satisfactory and courteous line of defence. But he did not avail himself of it. He asked a distinguished Newnham mathematician to comment on the letter in detail, and forwarded her observations. We may feel pretty sure, however, that his trouble was wasted. Anyone who was sensible enough to profit by a reply of the kind which he sent would hardly have failed to realise that his views were worthless before he submitted them to strangers.

It was during the time when I enjoyed the privilege of his intimacy that Christian Science first began to be talked of. His attitude towards it was one of sympathetic enquiry. That attitude was not (and is not) common in academic circles ; and Cambridge was somewhat scandalised to learn that a lady who had won very exceptional academic honours had become a convert. Sidgwick was, as is well known, a protagonist of the Women's Movement, but it had many opponents ; and one of them attacked him in conversation, pointing to what he considered to be the collapse of one of its boasted successes. Sidgwick was proud of his reply. " Are you aware ", he said, " that the President of the British Association is a Christian Scientist? "

Sir Douglas Galton, the eminent sanitary engineer, was here referred to. Sidgwick attempted, either personally or through the Society for Psychical Research (I am not sure which) to elicit from him some detailed statement of his views ; but without success. Galton replied to the effect that the matter was too personal and sacred to him to admit of discussion in an academic spirit.

This brings me to the subject of Psychical Research.

When the *Memoir of Henry Sidgwick* by A. S. and E. M. S. appeared in 1906, some reviewers noticed that in the part of the book dealing with his later years comparatively little reference was made to psychical research ; and they drew the conclusion that Sidgwick had become disillusioned on this matter, and regretted the time and attention he had given to it. Such was by no means the case. His interest was undiminished, though like other workers in this direction he probably felt that he was not destined to see the problems he had worked at finally resolved. His conviction of the reality of telepathy was the principal definite fruit of his labours. In saying this I am of course speaking from his own subjective point of view. The consensus of learned opinion has certainly not reached this point, though (unless I am mistaken) it is slowly approaching it. It may be remarked in passing that a revolution in thought of this kind is not usually, if ever, accomplished by the pundits of the older generation changing their minds ; but rather by their passing away, and being replaced in the seat of authority by men of the next generation who think differently.

The most discussed psychical topics at the time I have been writing of were the physical phenomena occurring in the presence of the Italian medium, Eusapia Paladino. Sidgwick's great gifts were not such as to qualify him particularly for experimental investigation. He would doubtless be as strong as anyone on the

purely logical side ; but experimenting is a craft, and the physical phenomena in question require for their investigation a kind of cunning in the devising of practical expedients, and an intuition as to the possibilities of deception, which he knew well were not his. His bent was not in any degree mechanical.

I never personally had the opportunity of seeing one of Eusapia's séances. She was entertained at F. W. H. Myers's house at Cambridge, and was, by all accounts, a somewhat difficult guest. It was found important to keep her in a good humour, and Sidgwick took much of the burden of this on his shoulders. Her only language was Italian, and he struggled manfully to make the most of such knowledge of it as he had.

The result of the Cambridge séances was disappointing, and most, if not all, of the experimenters were convinced that systematic fraud was practised by the medium. They themselves were not unprepared to meet guile with guile. Dr Richard Hodgson, an experienced investigator who was skilled in the resources of trickery, was introduced by Sidgwick as "an old friend", and without explicit statement the idea was subtly suggested that he was valued more in that capacity than for his brains. In this way the medium was put off her guard, with illuminating results.

No more was heard of Eusapia for a time. But presently reports of further marvels occurring in her presence reached this country from the Continent. I remember being present one day when Frederic Myers came in full of eager interest in these, and anxious to resume experiments with her. But his enthusiasm met with a cold douche from Sidgwick. After listening at length to what Myers had to say, he gave his verdict. "I cannot see any reason for departing from our deliberate decision to have nothing further to do with any medium whom we might find guilty of intentioned and systematic fraud." Myers, whose eagerness had by that time been considerably cooled, found little to say in reply.

One of Sidgwick's traits was a pronounced anti-militarist tendency. When after the Omdurman campaign, Lord Kitchener came to Cambridge to receive an honorary degree, some enthusiastic young woman said that he was her hero. When Mrs Sidgwick mentioned this, Sidgwick remarked that he did not think it heroic to mow down savages with machine-guns—it might be necessary, but that was the best that could be said of it. He was not tempted to think of himself as a man of action, "Knowing", he said, "that I have no physical courage, I always hope that I have moral." His own estimate of his physical courage need not however be taken at its face value.

During the Boer War his attitude certainly verged on the anti-patriotic. He considered the action of this country indefensible, I think on the general ground that the Boers had retreated to the Transvaal in order to get away from British rule, and that if British subjects had followed them there they did so at their own risk, and must put up with such legal and political status as the Boer government chose to accord. I do not remember how he dealt with the rather technical questions about British suzerainty which were involved. Mrs Sidgwick did not see eye to eye with him on this subject, and when he discussed it she was sometimes perceptibly irritated—a rare event indeed with her.

As the campaign proceeded, with very indifferent success to the British army, he took a gloomy view of the ultimate prospects. The following entry in the visitors' book at Terling bears witness to this, and was probably the outcome of a somewhat heated discussion :

Christmas 1899.

“ Edward Strutt bets Henry Sidgwick a thousand to one in pennies that there is not an independent Dutch Republic in South Africa within 5 years.

(Signed) HENRY SIDGWICK.  
EDWARD STRUTT.”

I do not think Sidgwick went so far as to wish ill-success to the British armies. Certainly he did not, like his friend Oscar Browning, speak of “ us ” meaning the Boers.

Sidgwick not infrequently told anecdotes about the mentality of his childhood, and the general impression they gave was that he must have combined an earnest sense of duty with complete trust in what he was told by superior authority.

. Thus he used to tell the story of how he began to learn Euclid. Impressed with what he had gathered from his immediate seniors of the difficulty of the subject, he determined to grapple with them before it was officially required of him and learnt several propositions by rote, apparently without any conception of what they meant. When his teacher discovered this and explained to him that that was not the way to learn Euclid, he burst into tears at the thought that all his effort had been wasted.

He used to dwell on the rude shock he had received when he learnt that “ Benefit of clergy ” had meant in effect that clergy might commit crimes with impunity for which laymen would be punished.

Sometimes, too, he would talk of his undergraduate days, but I am ashamed to find how small are the gleanings which I can now set down. He would tell how on one occasion reading mathematics

and classics alternately (he was reading for a double degree) he succeeded in getting in fourteen hours of work in the day. "But", he said, "I could not resist the temptation to spend the next day going round to my friends and telling them about it, so that the average was soon reduced to seven hours."

I gathered from this and other hints that his method of reading had not been of the severely methodical order, with rigidly fixed hours and unflagging attention. "You were with your books," he said. "If you were tired of reading you smoked a cigarette or looked out of the window."

Then there was a glimpse of the formidable Dr Whewell, Master of Trinity, on his way to the university sermon. According to his theory it was the duty of members of the university to attend it, and chancing to meet Sidgwick going in the opposite direction he gave expression to his views. "What did you do?" I asked. "I was not prepared to surrender my liberty of action," replied Sidgwick, "but I tried to look impressed."

There were many stories current in Cambridge of Sidgwick's *bons mots* in conversation. It was alleged, but upon the whole not credibly, that he used his stammer intentionally to give dramatic effect to them. Certainly however it was no disadvantage, for the point gained by being waited for with a moment's suspense. It is greatly to be regretted that there was no Boswell to record his sayings—and the attempt to collect them after so many years cannot have much success. However, here are a few.

It is related that the characteristics of Canon (afterwards Bishop) G. F. Browne were under discussion. Someone remarked that he was not open to the reproach of losing his temper.

*Sidgwick*: "No, b-b-but he rather obviously keeps it."

Sidgwick on Cambridge values, told me by the late Bishop Charles Gore: "If you want to stand really well with Cambridge, three things are necessary: that you shouldn't be known outside the University; that you should not know anything outside your own subject; and that you shouldn't write your own language gracefully."

It must not be supposed from these examples that he ever allowed himself to be cynical or unkind. They perhaps represent the limit of severity which he allowed himself, unless he felt that condemnation was really called for.

I remember once suggesting as a psychological experiment telling a story without any point to see how people would take it (the suggestion was doubtless crude and stupid, but it must be remembered in excuse that I was only a boy).

*Sidgwick* : " I have tried it. I remembered when I was half-way through the story that the point was at the expense of a near relation of someone who was there. So I left it out. But they laughed all the same."

*Self* : " You showed great presence of mind."

*Sidgwick* : " No, I cannot claim that. If I had invented another point, *that* would have been something to be proud of."

As a matter of fact, however, his readiness was extraordinary. A good example of it is told me by Lord Balfour. Sir William Harcourt lost his seat at Derby at the general election of 1895, and one Green-Price offered, or was said to have offered, to retire in his favour.<sup>1</sup> On this being read out across the breakfast table, Henry Sidgwick remarked immediately, " Well, it remains to be seen which half of his name will be justified this time."

Again, when some purist queried the word *reliable* (perhaps on the ground that it should be *rely-on-able*) Sidgwick remarked : " The prejudice against the word is unaccountable and even laughable : for the word, though not indispensable, should be generally available."

Apart from his spontaneous sayings, which were often so good that they were widely repeated, Sidgwick keenly enjoyed hearing or telling a good story. He was poles apart from the superior person who only sees in such a " chestnut ". I give one that I have heard him tell, partly for its own sake, partly because it may help to give an idea of his lighter side.

" The best example of spontaneous wit I ever heard ", he said, " was in the Trinity combination room, when a senior fellow was talking in a rather extravagant way, and turning round to one of his juniors said, ' My young friend here will bear me out.' ' Yes ', he replied, ' Certainly I will. There is a good precedent for it.' We are told that the young men bore Ananias out! "

At times he did not hesitate to descend to elementary forms of humour. He would repeat a good limerick with keen relish. One story that he used to tell against himself ran thus. He had formed a good resolution that when an idea or inspiration occurred to him, he would not let it slip by, but would write it down at once, so that it should not be lost. In the night he thought he had such an inspiration. Conquering his tendency to slumber, and his natural reluctance to leave the warmth of his bed, he got up and made a note of it. In the morning he remembered the incident vaguely,

<sup>1</sup> The offer does not appear to have been accepted, since he took a seat vacated by Cornelius Marshall Warmington, K.C.

and looked eagerly to see what he had recorded. He read as follows :

Sometimes on one leg,  
Sometimes on two.  
Something to think of,  
Something to do!

He thoroughly enjoyed the theatre, which always seemed to put him in excellent spirits. I remember walking through Piccadilly Circus with him after a performance, and I made some unfavourable comment on the moving illuminated signs displayed there. But he would not agree and maintained that "They add a distinct pleasure to life."

His autumn holiday was usually spent at his brother-in-law's home at Whittingehame in East Lothian. In the circle there his views were always eagerly listened for on any domestic or foreign crisis in national affairs ; they were sure to be ingenious and original, even if they did not carry complete conviction.

In the afternoons he appeared in another aspect. Garden golf was in fashion, and though only a very moderate performer, he got wildly enthusiastic and skipped about like a child in his excitement over the game. His long grey beard and the clerical wideawake hat which he always wore made the effect the more ludicrous. Billiards, too, he enjoyed enormously, though he was incredibly bad, having no notion whatever of the game, but no false shame about his incompetence.

It was over a game of lawn tennis, however, that I saw him for the only time momentarily angry. There was some question about whether a ball served was a fault or not. Sidgwick said that he saw the dust fly (from the whitewashed line). His opponent, not clearly apprehending the conclusiveness of this evidence, or perhaps not understanding what had been said maintained his position. Sidgwick may have thought that his veracity was questioned. His eyes flashed with anger, and he said, "Very well, but I shall avoid playing with you again." But he instantly accepted an apology, and I am sure never gave the matter another thought.

I say that this is the only time I saw him angry ; but though I never happened to witness it, I know that any selfish attempt to encroach on public rights moved him strongly to anger. Witness the following told by himself. He was sitting in a railway carriage and two persons of the opposite sex got in. One said to the other in a loud aside, "I am sure the gentleman will have too much good feeling to smoke in the presence of ladies." "Are you aware", said



Sidgwick, "that this is a smoking carriage?" and the attitude being maintained he deliberately took out a cigarette and lit it as a protest.

Sidgwick's studies in metaphysics and ethics were quite outside my ken, and I knew little of Political Economy. I was, however, contemplating some study in the latter for the Trinity Fellowship examination. Candidates were allowed to name the books on which they wished to be examined, and I asked Sidgwick's advice. He discussed the matter at some length, but somewhat undecidedly. Several books were suggested or dismissed. At last I said, "You have not mentioned your own book." The reply was characteristic. "Well, no, I have recently been going over it for a new edition, and the truth is that I find it so very dull that I cannot honestly recommend it.(!)"

As I recall this conversation I picture his study at Newnham, a smallish square room with walls entirely covered with books. There was a desk at which he would stand upright, reading or perhaps correcting proofs. The pendant electric lamp had been conveniently brought over it by an extemporised arrangement in which Mrs Sidgwick's hand might be traced—one knew instinctively that his was not the mind that had conceived it. The writing table at which he sat was covered with an incredible quantity of papers in disarray. This accumulation periodically overflowed into the drawing-room on the other side of the passage, where it was deposited on the writing table designed for the use of visitors. At this stage Mrs Sidgwick usually took action and a clearance was effected with her help. Apropos of this Sidgwick recalled a discussion which he had heard on how a murderer should dispose of the corpse of his victim. "I should put it among the papers on Sir ——'s writing table" was the suggested solution. "I think there would be cover for a small corpse on mine," he said.

Social intercourse and the exercise of hospitality were to Sidgwick keen pleasures. At the same time he had a definite ethical objection to luxurious expenditure. He used to tell how, at one time, he had under the influence of this feeling, severely simplified the entertainment at his dinner parties, cutting off the champagne or other expensive wine, and generally reducing it below the prevailing standard. But an unforeseen difficulty arose. He felt the need under these circumstances of making it up to his guests by added conversational brilliance; and the strain of this weighed so heavily upon him that he abandoned the effort and went back to the champagne! I think as a matter of fact that he appreciated good things and enjoyed them when he could do so without a feeling of personal responsibility. The cooking at Newnham was not above criticism,

and I have known him goaded into strong protest on the subject. Mrs Sidgwick said practically nothing in reply.

His ethical scruples had no application in cases when he was clear that comfort added to efficiency. I asked if he was in the habit of taking a sleeping car south from Scotland. "Yes," he said with decision, "I always take one. Life is not long enough to allow one to waste the next day by want of rest."

As may be read in detail in the *Memoir*, Sidgwick was a leader in the Women's Education Movement in Cambridge, Newnham College having been in large measure his creation. In 1895-6 it was felt that the time had come to move in the direction of securing the degree for women; it was found in practice (though the opponents of the movement could not or would not believe it) that the lack of a titular degree put women who had passed the standard at Cambridge at a disadvantage compared with women from other universities to whom the titular degree was granted. However, the attempt was not at that time successful. Party feeling ran high on the subject. Among other incidents a committee of undergraduates approached the Vice-Chancellor and asked whether they might present a memorial against granting the degree, and they were given a favourable answer. Sidgwick was much incensed at this. When the subject came up in conversation, and it was suggested that the undergraduate leaders were unjustified in interfering, I remarked that it seemed to me that they were whitewashed by the official reception of their memorial. Sidgwick was silent. When appealed to he said, "I quite agree. The undergraduates ought to have been told it was not their business. If I were to say publicly what I think, it would not conduce to peace. In a few years I shall resign my Professorship and then I shall say some plain words on that and other subjects." The failure of the movement was a deep disappointment to him, and he said wearily that he intended to give up trying to influence university opinion. The work was too much uphill.

Although in this particular matter he was a strong partisan, he was sometimes criticised for sitting too much on the fence. Thus, at a committee meeting on some question of university administration, the chairman observed him twisting his beard and showing signs of mental activity, and said, "Professor Sidgwick, do you wish to say anything about this proposal?"

*Sidgwick*: "I was p-p-pursuing a train of thought which might lead to an objection."

Sidgwick's sympathetic and unselfish nature showed itself in many directions, but nowhere more strongly than in his interest in the

hopes and aspirations of the younger generation. Any freshman who through old family friendship or otherwise had a claim on his notice was sure to be asked to dine, and cordially received; and if in any case the friendship failed to ripen, the fault certainly was not Sidgwick's.

He had, however, a rather unfortunate shortcoming in never recognising a passer-by in the street, and this was often misunderstood. Many people assumed that he had decided that conventional greetings were tiresome and that it was better to avoid them. However, I reproached him on one occasion with never recognising me, and he clearly failed to realise that there was any truth in the charge.

He always seemed to estimate the capacities of his young friends on a generous scale; and if they seriously failed to make good when it came to the ordeal of a Tripos examination, it was a shock to him. His natural reaction in such a case was to consider whether the university system was not at fault rather than the young man whom it had judged adversely. Perhaps this was partly due to his instinctive sympathy with the weak when at issue with the strong, partly to the vein of unorthodoxy that ran through his whole character.

I do not remember to have discussed religious beliefs with him, but his views are set forth in the published *Memoir*. A few casual gleanings may be mentioned. I have heard the present Archbishop of Canterbury quote in an after-dinner speech his remark: "Bishops individually represent everything that I find most agreeable; collectively, everything that I most detest." That (it seems) was what he thought of bishops, and it will serve to introduce what a distinguished bishop—Charles Gore—thought of him. He spoke of Henry Sidgwick as coming as near as any man he knew to the character described in the text "Blessed are the pure in heart."

Asked whether he regarded Sidgwick as a Christian, he said he did, and referred to the passage in the New Testament<sup>1</sup> on the two brothers, one of whom said, "I go" and went not, and the other said, "I will not go" and went.

In the summer term of 1900 I was in residence at Cambridge as usual, working in the Cavendish Laboratory. I dined with the Sidgwicks quietly once or twice at the beginning of term, but then followed a long interval without my hearing from them. It crossed my mind as a little odd, but I knew of no reason to attach special importance to it. Doubtless, I thought, they have not happened to

<sup>1</sup> St. Matthew xxi. 28-30.

have a suitable day free. Then came a letter from Mrs Sidgwick asking me to come and see them on an appointed afternoon. I did so, and Mrs Sidgwick told me, simply and bravely, the dreadful news. Sidgwick had had symptoms to which he had not attached special importance, but (I think at her insistence) had consulted a specialist, who pronounced that he had a mortal disease. An operation would be necessary almost immediately, but could not avert the ultimate result. Possibly a year or two of invalid life might remain in which he might be able to wind up the literary work which he had on hand.

I saw him for a moment after the interview with her. There was not a shade of difference from his usual cheery manner.

"Well, you have heard how it is with me," he said. "You see I believe in science; I am submitting to this operation though I feel perfectly well."

The next and last time I saw him was a month or two later at Terling, my own home. He had gone there to recruit, as was hoped, after the operation. But the result was far otherwise. I was sent for one day to his room. The change in him was terrible, and it was evident even to my inexperienced eye that the end could not be far off. He said that he had not strength for a long interview, but that he had sent for me because he wished to hear how my scientific work was going on. I told him what I could with a feeling however that the insignificant details of my efforts were quite out of place in face of the awful change that was impending. But it was like him to be thinking of the intellectual interests of another even at that time. He wished me good-bye, and hoped for my success in the immediate object of my ambitions. A few days later he was gone. He lies in the family corner in Terling Churchyard.